



THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON THE BEHAVIOR OF GENERATION Z CONSUMERS

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Abstract

Research background: Influencers create a powerful influence and attract a wide audience through their presence on social media. The impact of influencer marketing on the behavior of Generation Z consumers is extremely effective. Generation Z stands out for its digital skills and enormous engagement on social media.

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to research how influencer marketing affects the attitudes, opinions and behavior of Generation Z in the context of consumption.

Research methodology: The main research tool was a questionnaire consisting of closed multiple-choice questions. Empirical research was conducted on a sample of 252 respondents. Descriptive statistical analysis and multivariate statistical analysis (multiple regression method) were used in the primary data analysis to determine the direction and strength of the correlation between the observed variables and to confirm differences in behavior.

Results: The results indicate an extremely strong connection between influencers, social networks and the purchase decisions of Generation Z but influencers do not have the same influence on consumers of all generations.

Novelty: This paper contributes to the understanding of the correlation between influencers and the consumers of generation Z and indicate the factors that are crucial for the successful influencer marketing in the modern business environment.

Keywords: social media, generation Z, influencer marketing, influencers, consumer behavior

JEL classification: M31

Introduction

Influencer marketing is nowadays considered as one of the most effective advertising methods. The recommendations of products or services by influencers often have a great impact on followers who are motivated to purchase products or services promoted by influencers. The main characteristics of influencers are authenticity, expertise, consistency, creativity, credibility, advanced communication skills and ability to persuade. Through collaboration with influencers, brands have an opportunity to create relevant content, generate sales and build long-term relationships with the audience. Influencer marketing is a powerful marketing technique that allows brands to reach their target audience and build credibility through authentic endorsements and influencer promotion. This paper is primarily focused on the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z who grew up in the age of digital technology and who accepted it as an inevitable part of their everyday life. The increasing adoption of digital technology and social networks was the perfect opportunity to implement influencer marketing in a modern marketing surrounding and place it as one of the most efficient marketing strategies.

While the impact of influencer marketing today is rapidly increasing, it is crucial to improve the understanding of the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z. The aim of the research is to determine whether members of Generation Z consider influencers as a credible source of information about promoted products and services. The research was conducted in order to observe whether influencer marketing increase the followers' awareness of new products or brands, and whether they change their opinion about products or services based on the influencer's opinion. Moreover, research also examined the Generation Z consumer purchase decision process while purchasing products promoted by influencers. Although it can be characterized as effective and highly

influential, influencer marketing has a different impact on certain age groups. To compare the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z to members of other generations, the survey was conducted on all generation groups. The results of the research will enable marketers to understand and implement adequate methods of influencer marketing considering the generation of a specific target group with an emphasis on members of Generation Z.

In accordance with the topic, in the first part of the paper are defined the theoretical starting points related to the conceptual definition of influencers, influencer marketing, and the main characteristics of Generation Z. The second part of the paper presents the research methodology, results of the research and the final conclusion regarding the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z.

1. Literature review

Influencers have become key actors in the digital era by creating content that attracts attention and encourages interaction. Combining authenticity and aesthetics, influencers build a distinctive style and brand that the audience recognizes and follows (De Jans, Cauberghe, Hudders, 2018). Onwards, influencers also have a major impact on their audience's attitudes and behaviors (Hudders, De Jans, De Veirman, 2021) by using their social media presence to create influence and engage a wide audience (Folkvord, Bevelander, Rozendaal, Hermans, 2019). "Influencers also represent a new category of opinion leaders, with a position somewhere between celebrities and friends, that has emerged with the growth of social media opportunities" (Belanche, Casaló, Flavian, Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2021, p. 187). Not only that they share their opinions and recommendations, but also, they often speak openly about their own experiences which makes their content more intimate and accessible. Authors Nilsson, Murto and Kjellberg (2023) pointed out that: "Influencer content encourages engagement and follower responses, creates intimacy and expresses contrived authenticity and reflexivity" (p. 984).

Influencers represent new opportunities for marketing campaigns and advertising which is the reason why brands nowadays often cooperate with them to promote their products or services. Reach and impact achieved by influencer posts are important factors in influencer marketing (Gaines-Ross, 2002; Hudders, Lou, 2022). Reach refers to the influencer's direct and indirect connections with followers, while impact denotes their influence on their audience's decision-making. Influencers attain this impact through expertise, authenticity, and intimacy which helps them to attract large audiences (Han, Balabanis, 2023). Influencers, nowadays,

have a key role in shaping the habits and decisions of consumers, their recommendations of products or services have a significant impact on followers who are being inspired and motivated to try and buy the same products or services that influencers recommend.

Considering that the literature does not have a precisely defined classification of influencers, they are most often divided according to the type of content they are providing and by the number of followers. Other factors such as follower engagement, content quality, and a specific target audience are also crucial in determining the success of an influencer. It is important for influencers to use their platform responsibly, they have to be aware of their influence and spread positive messages to their audience (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, Switzler, 2007).

Influencers are often experts in a certain field, whether it is fashion, beauty, travel, fitness etc. and have knowledge and experience that they share with their audience. Their expertise is important to build trust and credibility to their recommendations and advice (Mesarić, Gregurec, 2021). They are also highly engaged with the audience, often communicating with followers through comments, messages and interaction on social networks. "Building strong and lasting relationships with their followers is the main objective of influencers to create successful communities. By covering certain topics of mutual interest and generating greater affinity throughout their interactions, influencers can achieve their main goal" (Belanche et al., 2021, p. 2).

One of the main characteristics of influencers is creativity in creating content which attracts attention and keeps the audience interested. Through photos, videos, stories and other forms of media, influencers can express their creativity, and inspire and entertain followers (Biloš, Budimir, Jakša, 2021). Another important characteristic of influencers is their impact on the audience. "The persuasive power of influencers seems to originate from their unique positioning as authentic, relatable, and accessible 'superpeers'. Not only do consumers actively seek out influencer content (as compared to traditional marketing communication which is often considered intrusive), but influencers are also perceived as credible and relatable endorsers" (Janssen, Schouten, Croes, 2021, p. 104). The recommendations, opinions and attitudes of influencers can have a significant impact on the decisions of followers, whether it is about purchase decisions, choosing a trip or making other life decisions. "Influencers are considered as a source of inspiration informing followers about the newest trends, products, and brands. As influencers often specialize in a particular domain, they are considered as experts and trustworthy sources of advice. This credibility leads to a greater acceptance of sponsored content" (Hudders, Lou, 2022, p. 5).

Their authenticity, expertise, engagement, creativity, influence and their social skills make them not only popular, but also powerful actors in the digital world. Their presence on social media enables them to reach a wide audience and build a strong connection with followers. Some of the important roles of influencers include informing and educating, inspiring and motivating, creating trends, making an impact on consumer behavior and brand promotion (Cialdini, 2008). Through their recommendations, reviews and product announcements on social networks, they can encourage followers to research additional information about the product or decide to purchase a particular product or service. Their impact on consumption can be significant, especially in the fashion, cosmetics, travel and other similar industries (Williams, 2016).

Collaborations with influencers have become crucial in brands' marketing strategies. Influencers can provide authentic endorsements and advertise a specific brand's products or services. Their influence and credibility can help to build brand awareness, encourage purchases and improve brand credibility (Backaler, 2018). The cooperation of influencers with brands is defined as influencer marketing which is nowadays considered as "condition sine qua non" in creating marketing strategies.

1.1. Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is often described as a marketing strategy where brands collaborate with influencers in addition to promoting their products or services. This form of marketing has become extremely popular and has been adapted as a key tool for connecting with target audiences. Mero, Vanninen and Keranen (2023) define influencer marketing "as the process of leveraging individuals as marketing messengers who can induce attitudinal or behavioral change in others" (p. 80). Mero, Vanninen and Keranen (2023) also emphasize that "...the fundamental difference between influencer marketing and traditional forms of marketing communications (e.g., advertising, content marketing, social media marketing) is that it is always conducted via a specific individual or group of individuals, rather than a faceless organization or brand" (p. 80). Brands are using influencer marketing and are cooperating with influencers to reach their target audience in an authentic and relevant way (Kwiatek, Baltezarević, Papakonstantinidis, 2021). By collaborating with influencers, brands can increase visibility, increase awareness of their products, generate sales and build positive brand perception (Szcurski, 2017).

Influencers are inventive at creating visually appealing photos, videos and stories that attract attention and encourage the engagement of an audience, so influencer marketing

provides the opportunity to create relevant and creative content. Influencer marketing refers to the cooperation of brands with influencers, whereby products or services are promoted through social media platforms. This enables reaching a wide audience and increasing awareness of a particular brand. The recommendation or promotion of a certain product or service by an influencer attracts the attention of followers which impacts their consumer behavior. Brands often use influencers' creativity for the attractive presentation of their products or services which can create an emotional connection with the audience. When implementing influencer marketing, it is important to find influencers whose interests, tone of communication and audience align with the brand's goals and identity. Cooperation with influencers can be in the form of sponsored posts, ambassador programs, product reviews, prize competitions etc. (Kostić Stanković, Bijakšić, Ćorić, 2020).

"Influencer marketing has emerged as a highly influential and effective marketing technique, enabling brands to connect with consumers at a deeper level through personalized and interactive content" (Leite, Pontes, Schivinski, 2024, p. 308). While cooperating with influencers, brands can create relevant content, generate sales, and build long-term relationships with their audience. Venciute, Mackeviciene, Kuslys and Correia (2023) emphasize that "Finding powerful influencers is relevant for social media marketing success that can transform a potential customer into a real customer through authentic content that an audience can relate to" (p. 1).

Followers often use influencers as a source of information and recommendations while making purchasing decisions. Through special offers, discounts or contests, influencers can encourage followers to engage and make purchases which can result in increased sales for the brand. Moreover, influencers have a strong connection with their audience which encourages interaction between them through comments, likes and content sharing. Influencers can encourage followers to ask questions, voice their opinions, and share their experiences with a brand or specific product (Schaffer, 2020). "Because of their talent, influencers are capable to include sponsorships seamlessly in their editorial content and engage their audience to interact with those contents. Accordingly, influencer marketing has been shown to be a very effective marketing tool and has attracted steadily growing advertising budgets over the past few years" (Hudders, Lou, 2022, p. 4). It is important to point out that the success of influencer marketing depends on choosing the right influencers, right communication tools and specific goals. The regular monitoring of results, analysis of feedback and adjustment of strategy are key to achieving success in influencer marketing (Cialdini, 2006). What is also important to take into consideration while implementing influencer marketing is the age of the targeted

group. Influencer marketing has a different impact on specific age groups, so it is crucial to discern the characteristics of each individual generation.

1.2. Overview of generations

Every generation has different characteristics and is determined by the year of birth, in the literature there are often mentioned eight generational groups that are nowadays coexisting. To distinguish each generation, the following table emphasizes generational differences through year of birth, label and main characteristics of each generation.

Table 1. Generational Differences

Year of Birth	Label	Characteristics
1901–1924	GI Generation	This generation grew up during the Great Depression and often fought in World War II. They are known for their sense of duty, patriotism and collectivism. The GI Generation emphasized values such as discipline, work ethic and togetherness
1925–1946	Veteran (silent) Generation	This generation grew up in a period characterized by economic crises, such as the centennial economic crisis and the Second World War. They are often called the “silent” generation because they were less vocal about their opinions and attitudes compared to previous and later generations. Their values include work discipline, family ties and traditional value
1947–1960	Baby Boomer Generation	Baby Boomers were born after the Second World War, in a period when there was a sudden increase in the birth rate. They are known for experiencing significant social changes, including civil rights movements, the feminist movement, and changes in family and work environments. Many Baby boomers valued job stability and traditional family values
1961–1980	Generation X	This generation grew up in a time of economic instability and changing social norms. Generation X is often perceived as skeptical and independent, due to their experience with parental divorce and changes in the labor market
1981–1999	Generation Y (Millennial)	Millennials grew up in an era of rapid technological development and globalization. This generation strives for flexible workplaces and values a work-life balance. They are active in the fight for social justice and are often associated with environmental protection problems
2000–2010	Generation Z	Generation Z grew up in the digital age, using the Internet and social networks from a young age. This generation is very aware of social and political issues and is often actively involved in various movements. Also, they are known for their ability to quickly adapt to new technologies and value authenticity in relationships and brands
2010–2024	Alpha Generation	This is the first generation that grew up in a world completely hooked on digital technologies. The Alpha generation is expected to be highly educated, with an emphasis on personalized learning and the use of technology
2025–beyond	Beta Generation	Although the Beta generation is difficult to precisely define, it is expected to reflect an even greater integration of technology into everyday life, as well as a greater focus on social and educational topics

Source: Thaariq (2023).

Considering that the focus of this paper is on Generation Z, it is important to highlight the main characteristics of Generation Z and their consumer behavior.

Generation Z, also known as “digital natives”, includes the demographic group born between 2000 and 2010. “They were born when digital technology had already been developed and was fully used to communicate through social media, what is shaping the characteristics of this generation” (Smaliukiene, Kocai, Tamuleviciute, 2019, p. 27). One of the main characteristics of Generation Z is their technological literacy and presence on social media. They are extremely adept at using technology, adopting new digital platforms and applications and are also often experts in digital communication and information technology. Digital connection enables them to approach a wide range of information and access to social networks where they can quickly and efficiently exchange information (Fistrić, 2018). “...technology does not only shape Gen Z’s social lives but other aspects, including their physical well-being, learning processes, and social and professional identities. Furthermore, because of their dramatic exposure to global mass media, popular culture and international companies’ marketing activities, they share a common consumer culture and traits” (Mason, Zamparo, Marini, Ameen 2022, p. 2). As Generation Z continues to develop and progress, its impact on the market will rapidly grow so brands and marketers will have to recognize the values and preferences of Generation Z in order to successfully adapt their marketing strategies and communication techniques. Creating authentic, relevant and inclusive content and establishing authentic connections with Generation Z are key elements in attracting and retaining their attention.

Members of Generation Z, who grew up in the age of the Internet and technology, prefer online shopping through digital platforms and mobile applications. They often choose online shopping on websites and mobile apps because of the convenience, simplicity and wide selection of products. They use mobile devices for searching for products, comparing prices, viewing reviews and, of course, for shopping via mobile apps (Fistrić, 2018). Members of Generation Z have access to numerous amounts of information about products and services via the Internet, so they are well-informed consumers and use this advantage while making purchase decisions. It is common for Generation Z to explore online reviews and ratings of products before making a purchase because the experiences of other users give them confidence and encourage them to buy products. Online purchases are becoming more and more important, basically because of its practicality and also because it enables the adjustment of adverts to the preferences of Generation Z. The members of Generation Z prefer to communicate with images, as opposed to the prior generation who communicate more with text and are looking

for innovative content. Generation Z is considered as the most materialistic, desire instant results and appreciate the communication of brands on social media, especially through micro-celebrities or influencers as they find them more authentic and relevant (Djafarova, Bowes, 2021).

Social media has a strong influence on Gen Z's consumer decisions. Marketers can interact with consumers through social networks, which enables them to understand their needs and desires better. The development of social networks has enabled Generation Z to leave the role of passive observers and become active participants in the sphere of marketing. Followers are inspired, informed and rely on the opinions and recommendations of influencers before making a purchase decision (Heinonen, 2011). "Traditional brands have been using influencers extensively to forge and foster positive relationships with Gen Z and to create a desired brand image" (Pradhan, Kuanr, Pahi, Akram, 2022, p. 29). Influencers are one of the main sources of information for Generation Z in the purchase decision process. "Gen Z considers influencers to be their peers, who give their honest opinions rather than acting as the voices of commercialization; thus, influencers are seen as the antithesis of hegemonic brands, which Gen Z views as opportunistic" (Pradhan et. al., 2022, p. 29).

2. Research methodology

A review of the literature undoubtedly indicates that influencers have a strong impact on consumer behavior and can lead to certain changes in consumer behavior. Therefore, this paper aims to answer whether consumers bought under the impact of influencers, whether social networks had an impact on it, and whether there is a difference in consumer behavior between different generations depending on specific marketing tools. Regarding the aim of the research, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H1. Influencers do not have the same influence on consumers of different generations

H2. Influencers have a significant influence on the purchase decisions of Generation Z

Empirical research was conducted on a sample of 252 respondents based on the results of a primary survey. The survey was conducted online during June and July 2024. The main research tool was a questionnaire consisting of closed multiple-choice questions, using a Likert scale with five levels of intensity. The first set of questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the second set of questions analyzed whether consumers bought under the impact of influencers. A descriptive statistical analysis and multivariate statistical analysis (multiple regression method) were used in the primary data analysis to

determine the direction and strength of the correlation between the observed variables and to confirm differences in behavior. Descriptive analysis was conducted to create customer profiles. The method of the data analysis was carried out in the Excel software package and the results are displayed in the form of tables and graphs.

For the analysis of H1, a sample of consumers belonging to Generation Z ($n = 89$) was derived from the general sample (while using a descriptive analysis). The aim was to analyze which factors influence the consumer behavior of Generation Z. Therefore, a correlation analysis determined the direction and strength of the relation between the source of information used by consumers and their purchase decisions. This was conducted in order to determine the impact of influencers on consumer purchase decisions, with a focus on Generation Z. Multivariate regression shows the intensity of influence of each factor on the purchase decision. A descriptive statistic was performed for all variables in order to distinctly describe the observed differences, and when it comes to differential statistics, a statistical significance level of 5% ($p < 0.05$) was determined. For the analysis of the defined hypothesis, the correlation method was used to measure the interdependence of the observed variables to determine the direction, intensity and significance of the analyzed connections.

2.1. Variables and measurement

In order to conduct the regression analysis and test the proposed hypotheses, it was necessary to clearly define and measure the variables included in the model. Therefore, the following variables were used:

1. The dependent variable in our model is the purchase decision (intensity/speed of decision-making), which reflects the level of influence experienced by the respondent when deciding to purchase a product or service.
2. The independent variables are the sources of information that may influence this purchase decision. These include: influencers, social networks, friends and family, TV, radio, newspapers, and company websites.

All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

2.2. Sociodemographic indicators

This survey used a sample size of $N = 252$. The survey sample was random, and the structure of the survey sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Sample characteristics, N = 252*	%**
Gender	
Female	84.74
Male	15.26
Generation	
GI Generation	0.00
Veteran (silent) Generation	0.00
Baby Boomer Generation	8.72
Generation X	23.02
Generation Y	32.94
Generation Z	35.32
Alpha Generation	0.00
Beta Generation	0.00

Note: * Number of participants, ** Percentage of participants.

Source: own elaboration.

The main limitation of the survey was the random sample of the survey so there was the possibility for consumers who are not members of Generation Z to access the survey. Therefore, only a sample of members of Generation Z ($n = 89$) was selected for hypothesis H2, and the entire population was used for hypothesis H1. It is also necessary to bring up that members of some generations did not participate in the survey (GI Generation, Veteran (silent) Generation, Alpha Generation, Beta Generation), which is also a limitation of this research.

3. Survey results and discussion

The paper aims to answer whether consumers bought under the impact of influencers and whether social networks contributed to this, and whether there is a difference in purchase behavior between different generations. With regard to the aim of the research, the hypothesis was put forward:

H1. Influencers do not have the same influence on consumers of different generations

Based on the stated hypothesis, the statements of the entire population ($N = 252$) were analyzed, which includes members of different generations. Members of the generations were determined according to the methodology given above in Table 1. Generational Differences. Unfortunately, only members of the Baby Boomer, X, Y and Z generations participated in the survey. The results of the research are shown in Figure 1.

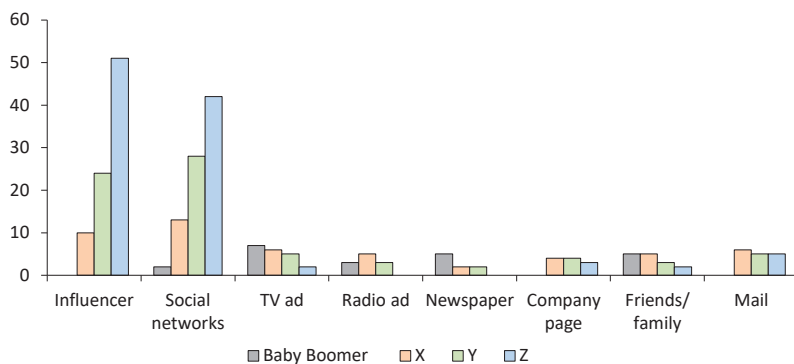


Figure 1. The impact of marketing tools on making a purchase decision

Source: own elaboration.

From this graph, it can be seen that the consumers of Generation Z are under the strongest impact of influencers and social networks, while the impact of other marketing tools on them are extremely low, in contrast to older generations, on which the impact of influencers and social networks slowly decreases while the influence of other marketing tools grows. This difference is particularly visible in the Baby Boomer generation, which shows a minor reaction to the impact of influencers and impact of social networks, while the influence of TV, radio ads and newspapers is growing, which is practically negligible in Generation Z. Therefore, the hypothesis; H1 – Influencers do not have the same influence on consumers of different generations can be confirmed.

The aim of the paper was to determine whether Generation Z consumers bought under the impact of influencers and whether social networks contributed to it. Regarding the goal of the research, a hypothesis was put forward: H2 – Influencers have a significant influence on the purchase decisions of Generation Z. To analyze the above hypothesis, it is necessary to determine whether the media influenced consumer behavior during the purchase decision, and to determine the strength of the correlation between the purchase decision and the factors that influenced it. The intensity of the influence of each factor on the purchase decision is shown by using the multivariate regression method, which attempts to determine the direction and strength of the connection between the source of information and purchase decision.

Below is shown the regression analysis which represents the influence on purchase decision of Generation Z depending on the implemented marketing tools.

Table 3. Regression analysis

SUMMARY OUTPUT					
Regression Statistics					
Multiple R	0.796				
R Square	0.651				
Adjusted R Square	0.628				
Standard Error	0.424				
Observations	89				
ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	7	29.569	4.224	21.409	4.633E-16
Residual	81	15.982	0.197	—	—
Total	88	45.551	—	—	—
	Coefficients	Standard error	t Stat	P-value	
Intercept	−2.3206	0.5821	−4.2242	0.0001	
TV	0.0923	0.1223	1.705	0.1202	
Social networks	0.3518	0.0896	3.1602	0.0032	
Company page	0.0540	0.0881	0.8496	0.3289	
Friends/family	0.2523	0.1262	2.5831	0.0236	
Influencer	0.4256	0.1125	3.3793	0.0021	
Newspaper	0.0440	0.0981	1.8199	0.0525	
Radio	0.0782	0.0608	1.3977	0.0960	

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the F test show that the regression model is significant at the 5% significance level. The value of the multiple correlation coefficient ($R = 0.796$) means that there is a strong correlation between making a purchase decision, as a dependent variable, and the source of information. The test is valid since the variance of the impulsive purchase of 65% of the 89 observed respondents was interpreted using the factors mentioned above, therefore the regression analysis confirmed a strong connection between the sources of user information and their purchase decision.

It is evident from the table that users significantly react to information provided by influencers, social networks and family and friends. Specifically, if the amount of information received from influencers increases by one point, with other variables unchanged, the intensity of the speed while making a purchase decision will increase by 0.426, with a significance level

of 5%, which can determine that influencers have a significant impact on making purchase decisions.

It is also important to emphasize the importance of ads sent through social networks on making a purchase decision. Namely, if we increase the amount of information about the product sent via social networks by one point, and the other variables remain unchanged, the intensity of the speed of making a purchase decision will increase by 0.352, with a significance level of 5%. It is interesting that the influence of information collected by family and friends is extremely significant for making a purchase decision, so if the intensity increases by one point, the intensity of the purchase decision will increase by 0.252, with a significance level of 5%. The indicators stated above indicate an extremely strong connection between influencers and social networks and the purchase decisions of Generation Z, thus confirming hypothesis H2.

To verify the assumptions of the regression model, additional diagnostic tests were performed. The Breusch-Pagan test was applied to assess the homogeneity of residual variance. The test statistic value of 2.87 with an associated p-value of 0.093 indicates that the null hypothesis of homoscedasticity is not rejected. This confirms that the variance of residuals does not significantly depend on the values of independent variables, supporting the validity of standard coefficient estimates and model conclusions. Furthermore, the Ramsey RESET test was conducted to evaluate the correctness of the model specification. The test yielded an F-statistic of 1.76 with a p-value of 0.177. Since this p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance level, there is no evidence of model misspecification, suggesting that the model does not omit important variables nor suffer from an inappropriate functional form.

The findings of this study align with previous research in the field of influencer marketing and generational consumer behavior. A clear generational gap was identified in how marketing tools are perceived and how they influence purchase decisions, supporting the hypothesis that influencers have varying effects across generations. This supports Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019), who found that Generation Z is more responsive to influencers due to frequent social media use and a higher trust in peer-like sources over traditional media.

Generation Z in the analyzed sample showed the strongest connection between social media use, influencer communication, and purchasing behavior. The regression analysis confirmed a statistically significant influence of information from influencers and social networks on their purchase decisions. These results reflect Lou and Yuan's (2019) conclusion that influencers act as modern opinion leaders, especially for younger consumers. Recommendations from friends and family also played a notable role, in line with Moore (2012), who highlighted the continued relevance of social influence in the digital age. Older generations, such as Baby Boomers and

Generation X, showed greater sensitivity to traditional media channels, reaffirming Bolton et al. (2013), who linked generational differences to media consumption and digital competence. Furthermore, the importance of trust and perceived authenticity – emphasized by de Veirman et al. (2017) – was evident in the sample, with authentic and emotionally engaging content significantly driving purchase behavior among Generation Z.

In conclusion, this study strengthens the existing literature by highlighting the central role of influencer marketing in reaching Generation Z. For marketers, these results underscore the need for personalized, authentic digital strategies tailored to this socially connected generation.

Conclusions

The current market environment highlights the importance of influencers in creating consumer attitudes and decisions. The influence is particularly prominent among the Z generation. Generation Z, which grew up with digital media, shows a tendency to connect with people who excel in their fields, and therefore influencer marketing can significantly influence their buying habits, creating trust and loyalty towards brands. Members of Generation Z often seek recommendations and opinions from their favorite influencers, brands have the opportunity to engage such personalities to directly reach their target audience. Also, the emotional connection these influencers often establish with their followers can result in a greater willingness of followers to try new products and services.

In light of all the above, the future of influencer marketing looks promising, but it is necessary for brands to be aware of responsibility and ethical principles when cooperating with influencers. Maintaining transparency and authenticity are key factors that can ensure that this marketing strategy is successful and long-term, satisfying both consumer needs and brand goals. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously conduct research on the mentioned issue, and some of the proposals for further research can be:

1. Research on long-term effects: To analyze the long-term consequences of influencer marketing on brand loyalty among the consumers of Generation Z, in order to determine whether influencer recommendations have a lasting effect on consumer behavior.
2. Comparative studies between platforms: Investigate the differences in the influence of influencers on different social networks (e.g. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), in order to determine which platform most effectively engages Generation Z and how it differs.

3. Analysis of different types of influencers: To examine how different types of influencers (micro, macro, celebrity) influence the consumption decisions of Generation Z and whether less known influencers are more effective in achieving authenticity and trust.
4. Influence of cultural and social factors: Research on how socioeconomic status, education and cultural context influence the perception and reaction of generation Z to influencer marketing.
5. Impact of crisis situations: Research on how the behavior of Generation Z towards influencers changes in crisis situations (e.g. pandemic, social and political changes) and how influencers can shape public opinion in such periods.

These studies can help brands and marketing experts to better understand the dynamism and changing trends that shape the consumer habits of Generation Z, and compare it with the behavior of other generations, which would give a clearer picture of direct guidelines for creating a marketing strategy in the future.

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